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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

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Memorandum

TO : COINS Project Manager

FROM : Chairman, COINS User Training Panel

SUBJECT: Semi-Annual Report, July-December 1969

Serial: COINS/014-70
DATE: 27 January 1970

Following is a revised version of COINS/014-70 dated 9 January 1970, same title, which should be destroyed. The version below incorporates comments and suggestions made by you and members of the CUT Panel.

1. GENERAL

A. BACKGROUND- The COINS User Training (CUT) Panel was established in July 1968 and held its first meeting on 8 August 1968. The name of this panel is expected to be changed in January 1970 to more accurately reflect its mission.

B. MISSION - The CUT Panel mission, as written or implied in its charter, is to motivate, train, inform, and assist personnel in the use of information files in the COINS Experiment, including the production of reference materials.

C. MEMBERSHIP- On 31 December 1969, membership of the CUT Panel consisted of the following persons:



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D. STATUS- The CUT Panel is active and has held regular monthly meetings since its inception. Currently the place of these meetings is being rotated between CIA, DIA and NSA where parking is less of a problem. Between meetings the Chairman confers by telephone with members.

GROUP 1
Excluded from automatic
downgrading and
declassification

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E. SPECIAL TASKS - On 2 December 1969 the Project Manager assigned three major priority tasks to the CUT Panel for emphasis during the next few months. These are included below with comments or references to other portions of this report where related items appear.

1. First, every effort should be made to identify and train one or two families of users in each of the participating organizations. This may mean exchanging visits and material between participating organizations.

Comments relative to this task are included in Section II, para. B.

2. Second, arrangements should be made to hold data base seminars as quickly as possible at those participating organizations experiencing difficulty in establishing families of users. The objectives of these seminars is to promote an informal dialogue between the file sponsor and the users or potential users of a given file. In the first data base seminar each of the major participating organizations (i.e., CIA, DIA, NPIC and NSA) should make a presentation on one or more of its files. In addition, they should provide handouts which describe the file and contain some examples of actual interrogations and answers. Each data base seminar should be geared to users in one organization and should be conducted in the organization for which it is intended. As a result the files discussed in each such seminar may differ for each Agency.

Panel efforts on this task are covered in Section II, para. c.

3. Third, a concerted effort should be made to have each participating organization prepare at least one or two case histories on how users in that organization have been able to operationally use the COINS files.

Section IV contains general information on this task, and as can be seen, operational usage is confined primarily to NSA. Write-ups on specific cases are being prepared by several analysts.

F. USER REQUIREMENTS - On 3 December 1969 the panel submitted to the Project Manager a beginning list of user oriented features which would facilitate acceptance of

COINS. It was pointed out that many of the items are not available to COINS users and that some of them cannot be made available within the present capability of the system. The panel recommends that the list be consulted in considering future improvements to the system. Aside from the question of file utility, user acceptance of COINS would be enhanced if these features were incorporated. A copy of the list is included as attachment 1.

G. RESPONSIBILITIES OF FILE SPONSORS AND USERS

A draft COINS Operational Procedure on this subject is being coordinated by the CUT Panel, and is expected to be published in February 1970.

II. TRAINING

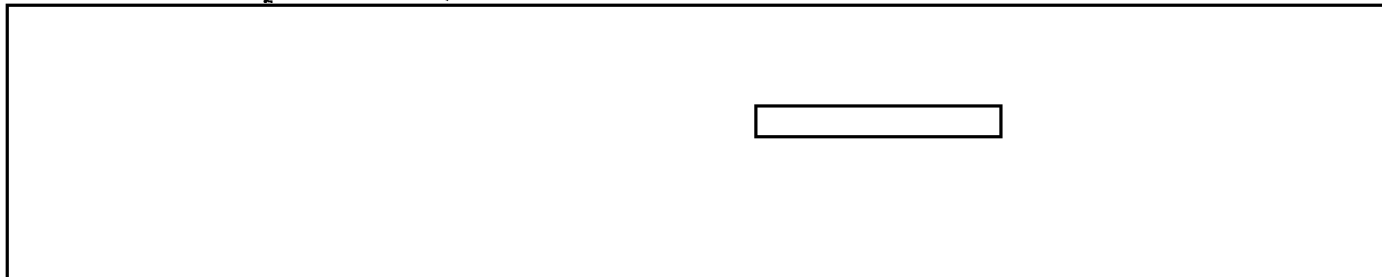
A. GENERAL - No formal classroom training on COINS was conducted at any of the agencies during this period. For most of the period, so many problems existed throughout the system that even the few persons attempting to use it were able to get only a very low percentage of answers to their queries. Thus it would have been folly to undertake a training program that would create additional users. Toward the end of the period, however, sufficient improvements were made to allow for the entry of a few more users. By then the test and analysis phase of the Experiment was upon us; therefore, a decision was made to concentrate on establishing one or two families of users at each agency. This plan does not require formal classroom training; it can be accomplished much more effectively with an "on-the-job" training approach. Unfortunately, however, even this plan has met with only limited success at most of the participating agencies, for reasons explained below.

B. EFFORTS MADE TO ESTABLISH USER FAMILIES - The object here was to establish one or two families of users at each agency who could and would make regular operational use of at least one file at one of the other agencies. The results are summarized below by agency (also, see Attachment 2).

CIA - Information on COINS files has been distributed and meetings with users have been held, including terminal demonstrations. Several analysts have expressed interest, and have levied queries, but they have met with very little success. Major problems have been (1) the CIA short operating period which makes it nearly impossible for them to complete many queries especially to NSA, and (2) frequent aborts from DIA caused by

saturation of the DIA system queue (limited to 50 jobs which are batch processed).

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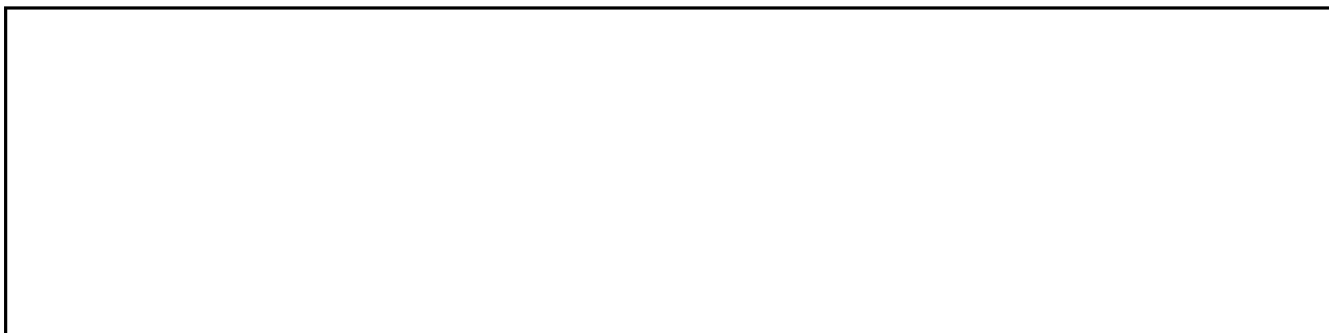


NIC - No family of regular users has been established at NIC. Analysts there are interested in the Soviet Air Activity files, now being maintained at DIA, but these files are not current enough for their needs. Also, they are interested in [redacted] files, but their experience with these files has shown them to be incomplete and/or out of date. Further, the DIA problems with NSA, CIA and NPIC are also experienced by NIC.

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NPIC - No user family has been established at NPIC, and cannot be while its system is out of the COINS network (NPIC pulled out in November for security reasons). Before NPIC withdrew from the network it had no operational users, and only operated in COINS for two hours per day.

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STATE- The [redacted] files are the only files of interest to State, but few operational queries have been generated. Problems are: (1) the files are not complete and current, and (2) the same problems that DIA has with NSA, CIA and NPIC.

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C. SPECIAL EFFORTS TO INFORM AND MOTIVATE USERS -- In addition to several reference documents that have been published or are planned (see section III), the CUT Panel is scheduling seminars on specific COINS files or file families. The first one was held at DIA in September on the NSA Field Post Number files, and a second one on the same subject is planned at DIA for January 1970. Also, a larger seminar on [redacted] in

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COINS is being planned for early February 1970. Others will be scheduled when it is determined that existing COINS users need them, or if/when the system capability is such that it can successfully handle a fairly heavy volume of queries from a broad range of users. Unfortunately, the latter does not appear to be possible in the present environment.

III. USER AIDS

The heaviest emphasis on COINS user support during this period was in the production of reference materials. The objective is to make it possible for a user to teach himself most of what is required to utilize COINS. Documents published and planned are described below.

A. CATALOG OF COINS FILES PUBLISHED - In order to acquaint users and potential users with all files available in COINS, a catalog of files was published in September 1969. Each file was described in two ways. A first page included general information, e.g., content, size, source of data, date span, who maintains it, security classification, areas covered, and remarks. A second page (more where necessary) presented the information fields in the file, including their size, code name used in addressing them in the system, and an expanded descriptive name. The catalog also pointed out that more detail is needed for making queries and provided instructions on how to obtain it from the COFSA file at DIA.

B. COFSA FILE EXPANSION - It had been expected that by the end of this period all COINS file descriptions would be included in the Community On-line File Structure (COFSA) file at DIA; however, the DIA programmer who was working on this project moved to private industry, and delays resulted while a new programmer was being assigned and oriented. COFSA is now being up-dated and more file descriptions are being added. Coverage at the end of December included all DIA and CIA files, and one of the NSA files. 25X1

E. PUBLICATION OF COINS WORKBOOK PLANNED - A workbook designed for use at any one of the participating organizations is expected to be distributed in March 1970. It will contain detailed descriptions of message headers/trailers/receipts for each agency and replicas of queries and answers for every file in COINS. Experience has already shown that users with no previous exposure to COINS can begin making operational queries immediately by following these samples. This has been the most effective way to begin with a new user, and is all that is needed for those with limited query requirements.

F. PUBLICATION OF COMBINED RETRIEVAL GUIDE PLANNED - A retrieval guide is being compiled which will present every available feature of a COINS query, step-by-step, and how each feature is handled by each of the participating systems. It will show in detail the similarities and differences (some in direct conflict) between the four languages, and should greatly assist users in minimizing their errors when querying more than one system. Further, it should prove to be a very handy reference for those arguing the merits of a common user language in COINS.

IV. COINS DATA APPLICATIONS

A. OCTOBER - DECEMBER STATISTICS - Attachment 2 depicts the estimated inter-agency operational usage of COINS files during the first three months of the test and analysis period. Note that the heaviest use is made by NSA, primarily because of the availability eight hours per day of several usable files at DIA. The other agencies do not have all of these advantages.

B. NSA ANALYTIC USAGE OF COINS DATA - Following is a list of the NSA projects on which COINS data from other agencies is being used on a daily or weekly basis (the file getting heaviest use is the Electronic Order of Battle file, EOBOA):

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ATTACHMENT 1

THINGS A COINS-LIKE SYSTEM SHOULD PROVIDE TO USERS

1. Answers (i.e., few queries should have to be re-entered through no fault of the user), and within a reasonable time (approx. 10-15 minutes).
2. Accurate and current data.
3. Automatic notification when the network switch or one of the participating system comes up or goes down.
4. Accurate and current descriptions of files.
5. Status of query messages, e.g., receipts from the parent system, the switch and the system to which the query is addressed.
6. Specific reasons for a query abort.
7. Common data standards (including brevity code names).
8. A common query language, with the following capabilities:
 - a. Extract on any field or combination of fields within a file, any data or combination of data within a field, and/or extract from a specified geographic area.
 - b. Sort on any field or combination of fields, within a reasonable maximum.
 - c. Perform counts or totals on any field.
 - d. Inter-file logic allowing the user to query more than one file through one input message, or answers should include reference(s) to other files in the network which may contain the desired answer.
 - e. Print any or all of the information desired from a file, within reasonable character limitations for each agency.
 - f. Some user capability for formatting of output.

ATTACHMENT 1 (Cont'd)

9. Output labeled with the file name, its classification and caveats as applicable (top and bottom), the current date, the identity of the user as provided at the time of input, an indication of the date level of the file and information retrieved and an end of message indicator.

10. Expansion of codes to clear text in output.

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